

## **Adolescents living in the North and South of Italy: territory, social capital and life choices**

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*Abstract* : The paper gives a broad overview of some results from the Italian PRIN study “Life Chances and significant adults in the educational and professional choices of adolescents”, analyzing the role of the territorial context in the decision-making process of adolescents living in the North and in the South of Italy, particularly with reference to informal education choices. After a brief review of the various meanings of territory in the decision-making process, the paper explores the relationship between new opportunities of choice for individuals living in different areas (South and North) and role of territory as a system of opportunities that enables or inhibits certain options. The paper aims to critically assess the results of the classical studies on the South of Italy’s “deficit of civicness”, recently recalled in the sociological literature, and which explain territorial differences as structural and embedded modalities, which affect all social behaviours (including choices). This alternative perspective – focused on personal resources and social capital – draws upon the crucial dimension of reflexivity among adolescents.

*Keywords*: Territorial differentials; Life chances; informal education.

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## Introduction

This paper offers an empirical contribution comparing adolescents' educational choices between the North and the South of Italy. Thus, specific attention has been paid to an issue that is already a widely debated topic in sociology (and elsewhere) concerning territorial areas: namely, the country's North/South divide. In the international literature the South's slower development is related to a structural deficit of social capital; which is to say, it is related to a weaker tendency towards civicness, which in turn produces failures and territorial divides in the educational realm (Putnam, 1993; 2002; 2004).

In spite of this, the general hypothesis tested by the paper is that educational choices can result from a complex process of reflexivity (Archer, 2003) undertaken both at the individual and at the relational level. This process can weaken the influence of the "lack of civicness" in a given ecological context (Putnam, 1993). Indeed, the aim of the paper is to prove that a local ecological deficit of civicness is not always structurally determinant, rather allowing for a specific role to be played by the opportunities on offer, on the one hand, and to individual agency, on the other.

From a theoretical perspective, the paper aims to provide evidence of how social capital can act both as a "set of moral resource" shared by a social system (*normative social capital*) and as a "developmental resource" that individuals can achieve through social relations (*resource social capital*) (Fulkerson & Thompson, 2008). Thus, the specific hypothesis of this study is the following: there isn't a clear-cut difference between the supply of social capital in the South and in the North both in terms of resources and moral norms. This reflects a mix of continuity and discontinuity between North and South in terms of educational choices concerning civic engagement, formal education, career and several contexts of informal learning. Thus, a paucity of *resource social capital* can reduce educational chances even where there is a high level of *normative social capital*. Conversely, educational chances can increase as a result of high levels of *resource social capital*, even with low levels of *normative social capital*.

The data presented refer to the 2005-2008 PRIN study “Life chances and significant adults in adolescents’ educational and professional choices”<sup>2</sup>, a survey conducted with a representative sample of 1,294 adolescents, proportionally distributed in different territorial contexts. In particular, the study compared two subsamples of adolescents who live in three sample Northern cities (Milano, Torino, Bergamo), on the one hand, and in two sample Southern cities (Bari and Salerno), on the other, both in terms of the formal educational system<sup>3</sup> (upper secondary schools) and of the informal educational system<sup>4</sup> (spare time, media usage, clubs membership).

### **The role of sociale capital: from the normative to the resource perspective**

Dika and Singh (2002) have observed that most of the limits of studies investigating the relationship between social capital and education derive from conceptualizing social capital prevalently as a moral norm in a given society, rather than as a resource that families and young people may have access to<sup>5</sup>. Many studies have predominantly understood social capital to be

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<sup>2</sup> Part of this paper is based on the proceedings from the “Adolescents and Life chances” PRIN study, carried out between 2005 and 2007 and funded by the MIUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research) The first outcomes of the study are published in the volume *Tra sogni e realtà. Gli adolescenti e la transizione alla vita adulta* (Between dreams and reality. Adolescents and the transition to adulthood), Roma: Carocci, 2009 (edited by Elena Besozzi).

<sup>3</sup> The sample included second and fourth year students enrolled in upper secondary schools (professional institutes, technical institutes and lyceums). The sample is made up of 737 females (58%) and 574 males (42%), for a total of 41 schools and 72 classes involved.

<sup>4</sup> For further details see the papers by Scardigno, F. (2009) *Il tempo libero tra condizionamenti e autonomia* and by Mongelli, A. *Il valore del no schooling* (2009). In Besozzi (2009).

<sup>5</sup> In a meta-analytic study based on a sample of research contributions published between 1986 and 2001, Dika and Singh state that “nearly all of these studies focus on the conceptualization of social capital as norms rather than access to institutional resources” (Dika S.L. & Singh K., 2002, p. 43). The aim of these studies is to confirm the positive influence of social capital on school completion (eg., reduction of school drop-out, continuation past compulsory education), on learning levels, on psycho-social factors

a collective resource that operates with functions of social integration (ie., *normative social capital*) as opposed to conceptualizing it as a resource that individuals and social groups can access via social relations (ie., *resource social capital*) (Fulkerson & Thompson, 2008).

Considering social capital as a moral resource implies developing interventions aiming at incrementing social cohesion; if, conversely, one adopts a definition of social capital as an “access route to developmental resources” implicitly the objective becomes that of reducing inequalities among different social groups. In this regard, Dika and Singh state that a certain «fascination with the idea that we are in social decline leads to the argument that the source of our discontent is found in lack of social control and cohesion as opposed to increasing inequality.» (Dika & Singh, 2002, p. 46).

Research in the educational sector, moreover, has also been affected by the success obtained by the definition of social capital promoted by Robert Putnam who, over and beyond other scholars, has drawn attention to social capital as a collective resource for social integration. For Putnam, trust, pro-social values, moral norms, social networks (especially urban area networks of civic engagement such as voluntary associations) and informal relations are resources which, from an ecological perspective, will be strongly predictive of the degree of development of a given society (Putnam, 1993; 2004). Putnam’s work has drawn attention to the supply of social capital of a specific ecological unit (a state, an administrative region, an urban area, etc.), creating a strong stimulus for research investigating territorial differences in development also in the educational field. Indeed, in his research Putnam tries to demonstrate how States with higher levels of social capital are also those with the best educational performances. In his analyses, the social capital index is closely correlated with indicators of school results, even when other concomitant factors, such as income, parental education, education expenditure and teachers’ salaries are taken into account (Putnam, 2002, 2004).

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correlated with educational performances (eg., parents’ educational expectations, collaboration between schools and families, values of the peer group) (Dika S.L. & Singh K., 2002, pp. 41-43).

The idea that low educational performances in a specific territory are determined by a structural deficit of social capital has thus taken hold<sup>6</sup>. In Italy, in line with research investigating the deficit of social capital in the South<sup>7</sup>, this perspective is used, for example, to explain the stronger academic preparation of Northern as opposed to Southern students. Such empirical evidence is made evident in the territorial analyses of the OCSE-PISA data regarding basic skills among students (reading and comprehension, mathematics, science and problem solving) (Bratti, Checchi, Filippin 2003; Montanaro 2008).

More recently, we have witnessed the rise of a relational perspective alongside the classic normative perspective, which posits that individuals intentionally look for benefits via social relations (Lin, 2001) and are capable of choosing autonomously despite conditioning from social and territorial belonging (Coleman, 2005), of participating in the creation of “relational goods” and of sharing values of reciprocity and trust (Donati & Tronca, 2008). According to this perspective, educational success is not *de facto* anchored to the quantity or the strength of social capital present in a specific ecological unit in the form of “moral norms”<sup>8</sup>. The local supply of social capital, thus, rather than being a structural factor, seems to exercise more of an impact on social actors’ subjective capacities to utilize their own social capital in its different forms (drawn from the family, school, peer groups, and associative networks) without necessarily predetermining them.

### Investigation

The data analysed in this paper refers to the 2005-2008 PRIN study “*Life chances and significant adults in adolescents’ educational and professional choices*” (Besozzi, 2009). The research methodology used included two phases of data collection. In the first year a set of 117 in-depth face-to-face

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<sup>6</sup> See also Field, J. (2003, 2005); Gradstein, M., Justman, M. (2002)

<sup>7</sup> As well as the study conducted in Italy by Putnam R. (1993), see also Cartocci R. (2006; 2007); Coppola F. & Formiggiani G. (2008); Pezzulli F.M. (2001)

<sup>8</sup> These are the moral constraints that induce the individual to sacrifice one’s interests for the collective good.

interviews were conducted with a sample of 38 students, plus their parents and teachers, based in three Northern cities (Milano, Torino, Bergamo) and two Southern cities (Bari and Salerno). In the second year a quantitative enquiry was carried out in the same five cities, using a questionnaire administered to a probabilistic sample of 1.294 public upper secondary school students enrolled in either a Lyceum, a Technical Institute, or a Professional Institute (Italian vocational schools). A stratified sampling technique was employed, which consisted in extracting only the 2nd and 4th year students from the 41 schools participating in the study. The sample is made up of 836 students living in the North (65%) and 458 students living in the South (35%); of these, 58% was females and 42% male. In total, 41 schools and 72 classes participated in the second phase of the study.

Specific measures were been adopted for the concept of *normative social capital* and for that of *resource social capital*.

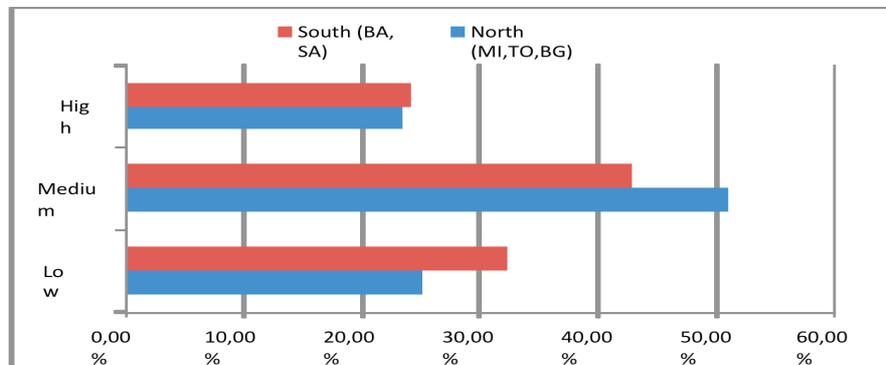
According to the normative perspective, social capital has been first operationalized as associative participation. Specifically, the survey conducted included measures of associative membership frequency of participation. Furthermore, the data referred to trust in significant adults and educational agencies. Finally, a measure of the propensity to adhere to social rules was synthesized in the Transgression propensity index, based on the following items: meanings of being an adult, adolescent behaviour in the public and private domains, respect for rules, punishment for those who do not respect those same rules. Resource social capital has been operationalized as the intensity with which young people interviewed feel they can count on their family, school or peer groups. Namely, a specific index of significance has been adopted for peer, school and family networks respectively. Significance is based on the influence of each on educational choice and adolescents' levels of trust and importance attributed to the opinions of the three different relational networks.

### **North-South continuity and discontinuity in terms of social capital endowment**

The first level of analysis refers to a comparison of the responses

obtained in the two subsamples of our study with reference to the classic indicators of normative social capital<sup>9</sup>. A comparison of the significance values<sup>10</sup> shows no substantial differences between the Northern and the Southern cohort. For example, the percentage of Northern adolescents with a medium-to-high score on the Index of Associative Participation is only 4 percentage points higher than that of Southern adolescents. Moreover, the correlation between the Associative Participation index and location is not statistically significant ( $p>0,05$ ). Also, no major differences emerge between Northern and Southern adolescents within our sample in terms of high ascribed status (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Index of status<sup>11</sup> in % (N=1291)



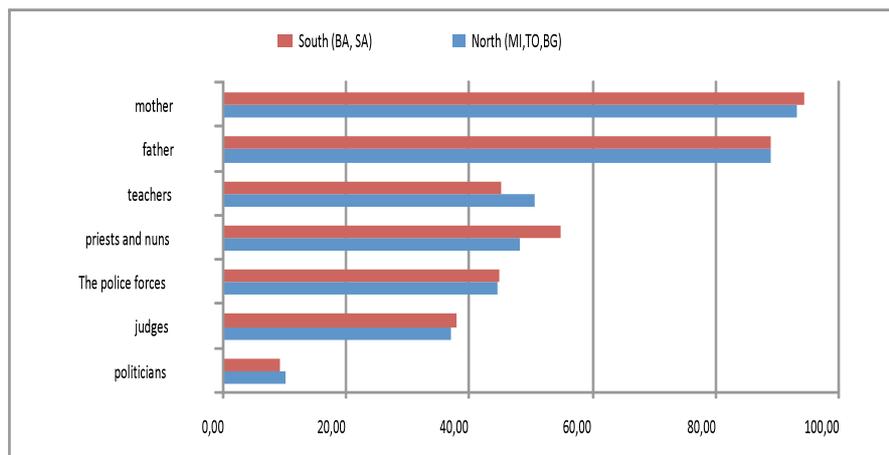
<sup>9</sup> In summary, the main dimensions of the normative conception of social capital are the following: organizational life of a community (eg., the presence of civic organizations); participation in public life (eg., electoral participation); volunteering (eg., participation in charitable projects and associations); informal social relations (eg., the frequency with which one meets friends); social trust (eg., trust in public figures) (Putnam, 1993, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> The indexes are summary variables made up of various original variables (indicators) that refer to a specific dimension measured in the study. The advantage of these measures is that, for each respondent, they offer a point on a scale that ranges from low to high values, which summarises the position of the respondent with reference to the given dimension in a numerical value.

<sup>11</sup> The Index of Status was constructed on the basis of the measures of parental educational level and profession.

There appear to be no relevant differences in terms of the types of groups or associations respondents belong to. Young people, be they from the North or from the South, are affiliated primarily to sports clubs (22.8% in the North, 22.3% in the South) and parochial associations (11.8% and 10.3, respectively). In terms of young people's volunteering activities, moreover, an 8 point percentage difference is certainly not evidence of a severe lack of pro-social behaviour among young Southerners as opposed to young Northerners<sup>12</sup>. Frequency of participation in the activities of one's association, for instance, is higher in the South<sup>13</sup>. The degree and intensity of trust towards social and institutional authorities is also not substantially different among the two territorial areas considered (see Graph 2), with the exception of trust for teachers, which is slightly higher in the North (+5.5%), and trust for religious figures, which is slightly higher in the South (+6.7%).

Graph 2. How much trust do you have in (% value aggregates of the responses "enough" and "a lot")<sup>14</sup>



<sup>12</sup> 10.7% of young Southerners volunteers with a charity, as opposed to 18.9% of Northerners.

<sup>13</sup> Young Southerners claimed they participate in the activities of the association they are members of "at least once a week" in 13.8% of cases, compared to 9.4% amongst young Northerners.

<sup>14</sup> Response percentages are as follows: mother 99.6%, father 98.2%, teachers 99.7%.

The lack of *civiness* (*normative social capital*) in the South, however, emerges clearly from the data regarding adolescents' propensity to adhere to social rules. Young Southerners report more transgressive behaviours, as shown by significantly higher scores on the Transgression Propensity Index<sup>15</sup> (cf. Table 1).

Table 1. Transgression Propensity Indexes by city

CITY	Transgression Propensity Index						Total	
	Low		Medium		High		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
BARI	79	39.7	75	37.7	45	22.6%	199	100.0%
BERGAMO	136	54.2	67	26.7	48	19.1%	251	100.0%
MILANO	165	47.7	110	31.8	71	20.5%	346	100.0%
SALERNO	113	43.8	96	37.2	49	19.0%	258	100.0%
TORINO	126	54.8	63	27.4	41	17.8%	230	100.0%
Total	619	48.2	411	32.0	254	19.8%	1284	100.0%

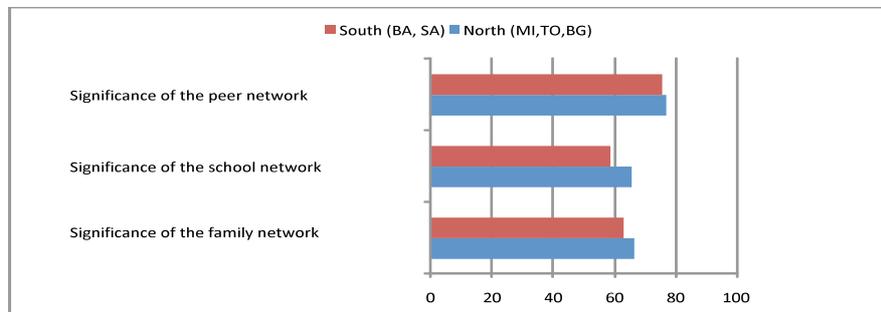
Transgressive behaviours refer both to actions which indicate respect (or lack thereof) for a public dimension of life (eg., *not paying for public transport, shoplifting, vandalising public benches and writing on walls*) and behaviours connected with one's personal life (eg., *excessive drinking, bullying, using blasphemous language, getting into fights*). Becoming an adult in Bari and Salerno chiefly means "being free to do what one wants"; indeed, 33.3% of Barese adolescents and over 30% of Salernitan adolescents strongly agree with this statement, in contrast to adolescents from other cities in the North where percentages of agreement are significantly lower (only approximately 20% report a strong agreement with the statement).

<sup>15</sup> The Transgression Propensity Index was constructed with reference to variables relating to: the meaning of being an adult, adolescent behaviour in the public and private domains, respect for rules, punishment for those who do not respect those same rules.

However, should we analyse the motivations which are at the root of such transgressive behaviours, as opposed to propensity towards transgression itself, what emerges is a form of ambivalence linked to what is known as the “double movement” (Nedelmann, 1983). Transgressing appears to respond primarily to an identity requirement, namely that of “*feeling important*”, and is connected to that double tension between belonging and differentiation, between the desire to be appreciated and the need to feel part of a group. This is a need which is transversal across territories, so that 33% of adolescents from Bari, 32% of those from Bergamo, 29.4% of those from Milano, 31.2% of those from Salerno and 49.4% of those from Torino concur that “*wanting to feel important*” is the primary motivation behind adolescent transgressive behaviour.

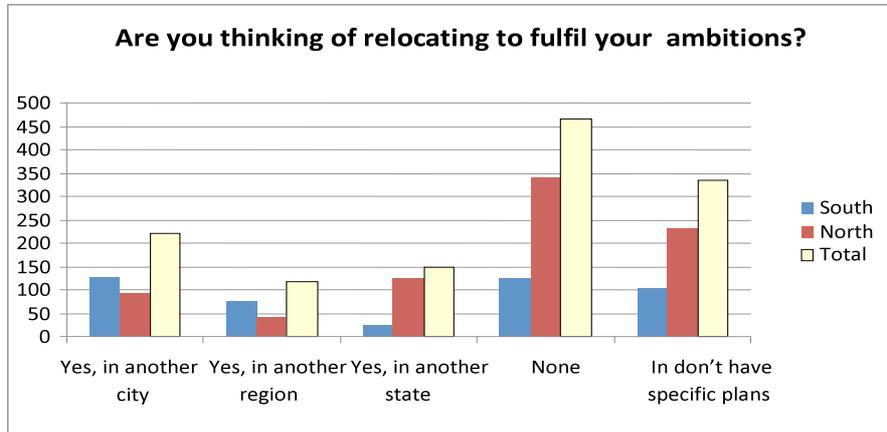
The real differences among the two subsamples, however, emerge from the indicators of relational social capital, i.e. the opportunities for accessing new resources that social relations enable. The indicators used in the study<sup>16</sup> measure the intensity with which young people interviewed feel they can count on their family, school or peer groups. Taking a look at these indexes, the percentage of adolescents with high scores is noticeably greater in the Northern cities as opposed to the South (see Graph 3).

Graph 3. Social Capital Indexes: aggregate % values of “medium” and “high” responses (N=1294)



<sup>16</sup> The original variables refer to: the role of different networks – family, school and peer – in educational choice; the degree of trust adolescents have in their parents, in their teachers, in their friends; and the degree of importance given to the opinions of the three different relational networks.

Graph 4. Relocating in order to fulfil one's ambitions: a North-South comparison



When a significance analysis is conducted on the two subsamples, a significant difference emerges between North and South ( $\chi = 1.33$   $p \leq 0.01$ ) with reference to the variable that measures sense of belonging and attachment to one's territory – i.e., “*thinking of relocating to find work*” (Graph 4): young Southerners demonstrate a sense of belonging and attachment to their local territory, but at the same time seem to express a greater awareness of the geographic mobility requirements for professional advancement and fulfilment.

Indeed, the Northern cities appear markedly more dynamic, with respect to both the local entrepreneurial fabric and job market, as evidenced by indicators such as the number of active businesses and local rates of occupation and activity (whether measured as aggregate figures or with reference only to data concerning the female and young population<sup>17</sup>). These elements explain the newfound and contingent waves of migration of young Southerners towards Northern cities, especially among young people with higher levels of education (Viesti, 2005; Pugliese, 2006). The

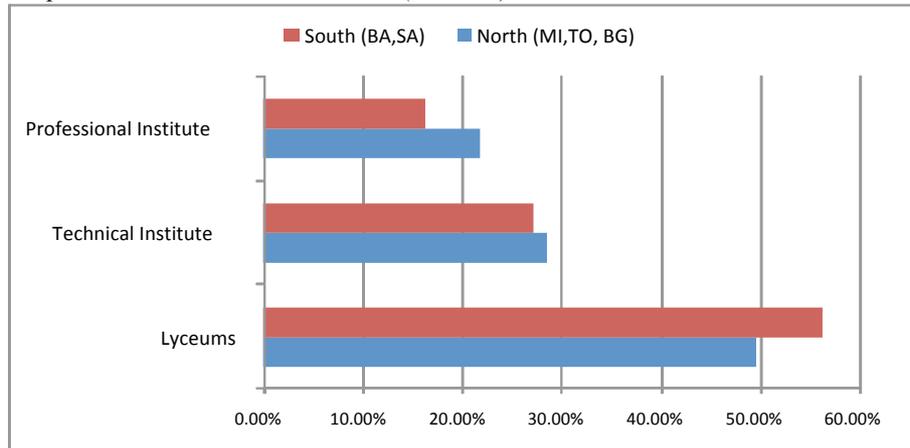
<sup>17</sup> For active businesses see the CCIAA data (available on <http://www.infocamere.it/movimpresa.htm>). Regarding the job market, see the “Excelsior” data in (<http://excelsior.unioncamere.net/web/index.php>). For figures on employment, see the data collected by ISTAT on the Labour Force.

adolescents interviewed in this study seem to be aware of the limits and potentialities of the urban context they inhabit. This indicates the relevance of the reflexive and intentional process of Italian adolescents, especially among young Southerners.

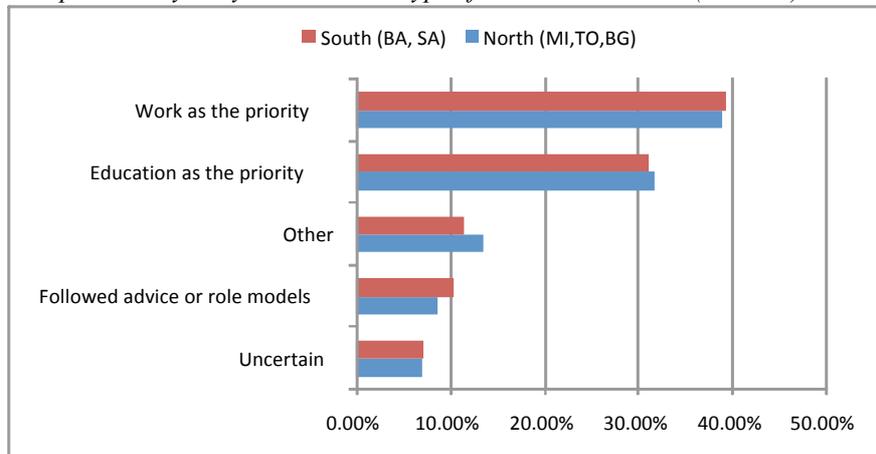
### North-South continuity and discontinuity in educational choices

Taking a look at the choices made by the two subsamples in the specific domain of schooling experiences there is a substantial continuity between the two areas of the country, specifically in terms of educational choices (Graph 5).

Graph 5. "School choices" % values (N=1294)

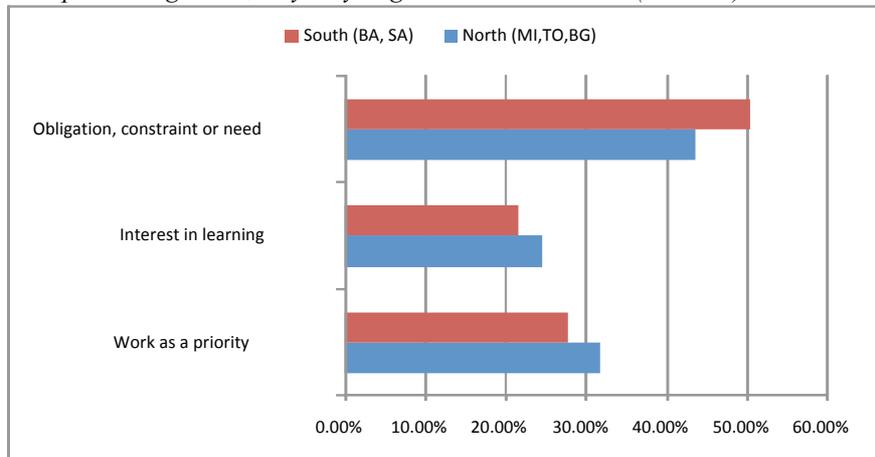


The continuity between North and South also concerns the predominantly instrumental valence that secondary school choice takes on with respect to future job opportunities. In fact, as indicated in Graph 6, in general, no meaningful differences in terms of motivation in school choice are observable between the two macro territorial areas.

Graph 6 - "Why did you choose this type of school?" % values (N=1288)<sup>18</sup>

Some differences emerge, however, in terms of the significance that young interviewees attribute to the educational experience, which can be understood to be an obligation, a personal interest or as merely functional to job-seeking. In the latter case, the perception of the *constraining nature* of the educational experience is greater among the adolescents of Bari and Salerno, as shown in Graph 7. In the Southern cities, in fact, the young people interviewed are more affected by parental opinion and by socially-defined educational values (+6.90%) than from personal values and their individual interest in learning.

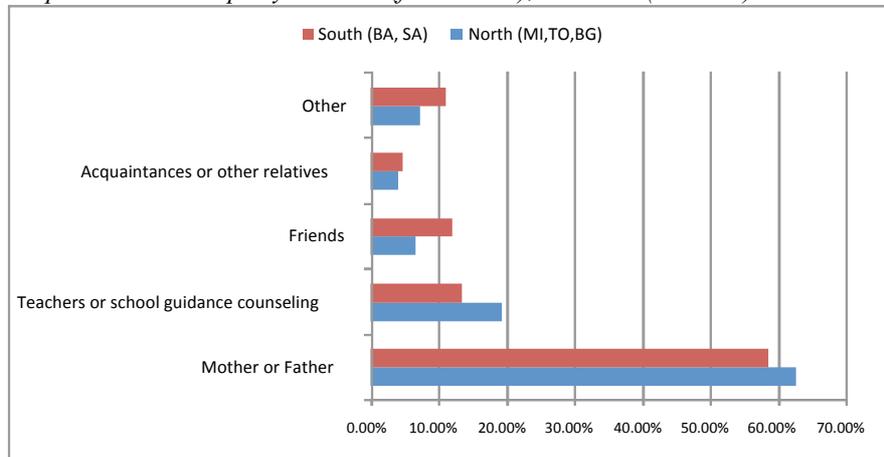
<sup>18</sup> The category "work as the priority" corresponds to the following items: "I'm interested in practical activities, "it will enable me to find a job easily", "because it only lasts a few years", "useful for the job I want to do in the future", "I want to learn this trade". The category "education as the priority" corresponds to the following items: "I'm interested in the subjects studied", "in order to go to university". The category "following advice or role models" corresponds to the following items: "it's the same type of school my mother attended", "it's the same type of school my father attended", "my teachers suggested it", "I wasn't the one who made the choice, it was my parents", "I want to follow the example of...". The category "uncertainty" corresponds to the item "I chose randomly, I had no precise plans".

Graph 7 – In general, why do you go to school? % value (N=1283)<sup>19</sup>

Parental conditioning with regards the educational decision-making processes for secondary school choice is an element that Northern and Southern adolescents have in common. In fact, regardless of local context, adolescents do not appear to make prevalent use of advice from teachers or school guidance in their choices, but rather rely primarily upon parental advice, particularly maternal advice (Graph 8).

<sup>19</sup> The category “work as the priority” corresponds to the items “finding a good job”, “finding a job soon”. The category “interest in learning” corresponds to the items “learning new things”, “learning Italian better”, “like to study”. The category “obligation, constraint or necessity” corresponds to the items “parental constraint”, “making parents happy”, “why mandatory”, “cannot be avoided now”.

Graph 8 – Who's helped you most? (first choice), % values (N=1142)

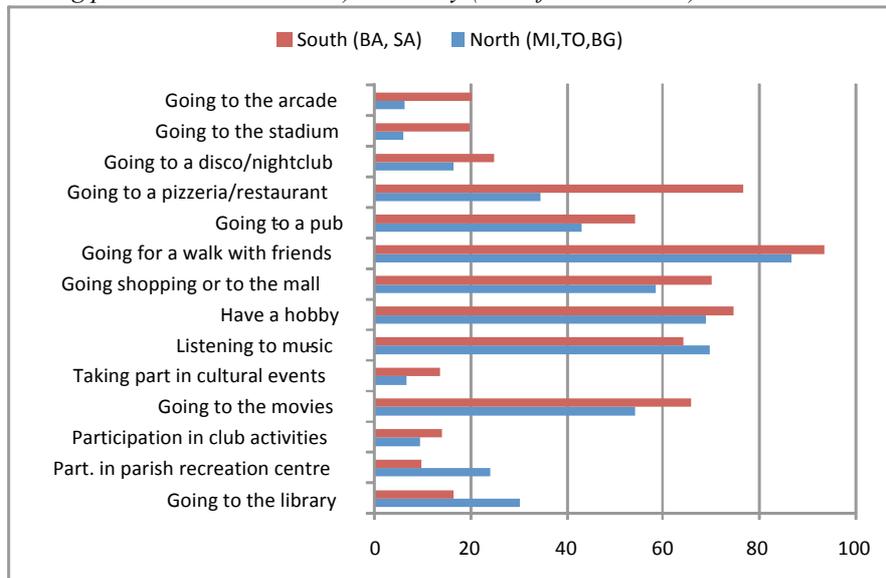


It appears evident, therefore, that this aspect exposes young people to the conditioning process exercised by parental cultural capital – something which is, on average, higher in the North – and to the risks of early school dropout (Colombo, 2010). Among our sample, in fact, Southern mothers are prevalently housewives, whose level of education is generally lower than that of Northern mothers. Moreover, friendship networks seem to have a greater relevance in the South. This finding raises the question of the lack of a school guidance counselling system able to regulate the territorial differences among other educational agencies outside the school system (Besozzi, 2006), as well as reducing the net disproportional effect of inequality in a system, such as the current one, based on school tracking and choices made in advance according to an early channelling of professional or educational routes.

Observing the choices of adolescents in the informal sector of extra-curricular activities, in the present the study we analyzed the data relating to the frequency of cultural activities conducted in their spare time. Graph 9 shows how Northern adolescents' level of participation in extra-curricular activities that involve the mediation of significant adults (eg., the *oratorio* or parish recreational centre) or institutions (eg., attending a library) is noticeably higher compared to their Southern counterparts. Conversely, if

we consider extra-curricular activities which young people can undertake independently of adult supervision (eg., going to the movies, going for a walk with friends or meeting in leisurely places), Southern adolescents show distinctly higher values for almost all of the activities considered

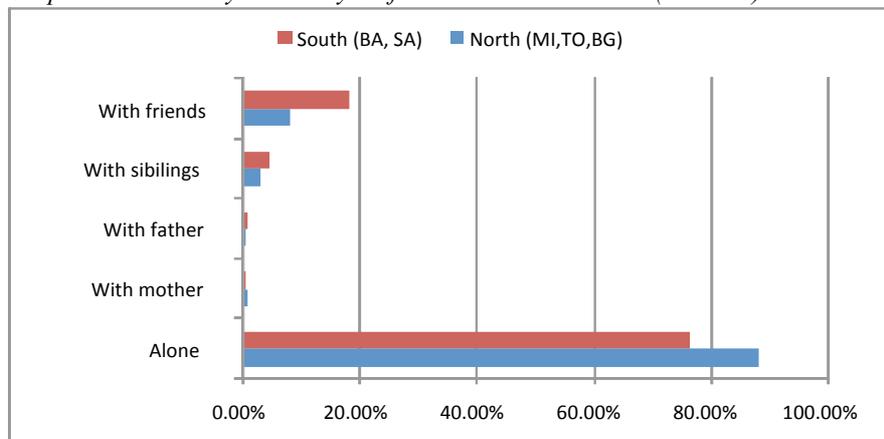
Graph 9. “Which of the following cultural activities do you undertake in your spare time? How often?” - % values of those who undertake the following activities at least once a month (“going to the library”, “going to the movies”, “taking part in cultural events”) or weekly (rest of the activities)



If we continue to consider choices in the informal domain, one piece of data that is common to both Northerners and Southerners, as one might easily imagine, is related to the use of “new media”, which highlights the role of the local territory as a demarcation line in the classic relationship between “ascribed endowment -- educational choices – social mobility” (Gambetta, 1990; Schizzerotto, 2002). It’s plausible, in fact, that the absence of significant differences (the use of the Internet among Northerners and Southerners corresponds to 88.20% and 87.60% of the

sample, respectively) is the effect of a more equal distribution of media resources across the national territory. For this reason, the differences which emerge in the style of consumption for various media are more directly attributable to motivations and drives connected to individual and relational biographies. For example, some differences concern the tendency among Southern adolescents to spend more time on the net and to do it in a more socialized way and with peers compared to their Northern counterparts (*Graph 10*).

*Graph. 10. "Who do you usually surf the net with? % values (N=1134)*



( $p < 0.00$ )

These data seem not only to confirm the hypothesis of the transversal nature of choices with reference to territorial context, but also indicate how the extra-curricular area emerges as a “non protected” space, especially for Southern adolescents (Colozzi & Giovannini, 2003), outside parental and adult control, in which the choices of how to spend one’s spare time are an expression of *time for oneself* (Belloni, 1994). On the other hand, this same desire for independence is connected to the risk of ambivalence between the desire to feel recognized as part of a group, to feel the same, to belong and be part of a stable friendship network, and an equally strong desire to for differentiation from the crowd, for independence, and in some ways, for

respect as an individual who can resist group pressure. It's a desire that often generates a crisis in the normative socialization process of Italian families (De Piccoli, Favretto, Zaltron, 2001).

The differences between the Northern and the Southern cities highlighted by the study are indicative of how the urban context can be crucial in influencing the reflexivity of choices and the containment of ascribed variables relative to family status. In other words, in contexts with more opportunities and endowed with more social capital the individual can operate a greater range of choices, supported by his or her network of relations, and thus also escape the influence of family status. However, the results of the analysis also offer some clues as to how this process can be activated in contexts with less opportunities and with a smaller supply of social capital, such as Southern cities, where an awareness of these limits does not impact negatively on singular achievement, but rather may contribute to sustain it.

Focussing our attention on the relationship between certain significant variables we have tried to observe the significant differences between the two subsamples via the *chi squared* coefficient for statistical association for non ordinal categorical variables and *Somer's D*<sup>20</sup> for ordinal categorical variables. If we consider the behaviours of the adolescents interviewed in the informal sector, the different territorial contexts (North and South) do not seem to alter the force with which family status impacts upon young peoples' informal choices.

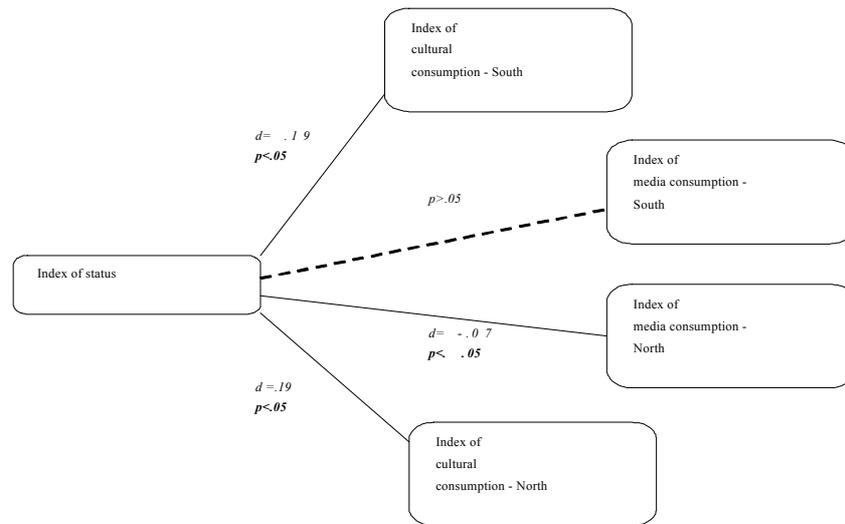
In fact, in all the cities considered in the study, despite a significant positive correlation between the index of status and indexes of informal learning choices, both the cultural consumption index and the media consumption index appear to be weakly influenced by family status (see Graph 11). One might think that in areas which are poorer in extra-curricular stimuli, family status would influence the choices of adolescents outside the realm of formal education. On the contrary, both in the North and in the South, the choices concerning the informal sector do not seem to be conditioned by family status. This independence of choice appears to be

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<sup>20</sup> The value of this coefficient ranges between -1 (maximum negative correlation), 0 (lack of correlation), and +1 (maximum positive correlation). *Somer's D* also offers a measure of the direction of the correlation, according to the dependent variable considered.

stronger in the South with reference to media consumption where, moreover, the correlation with the index of family status is not statistically significant<sup>21</sup>.

Graph. 11. Correlation coefficients between the index of Status and indexes referring to informal learning choices



In conclusion, it is relevant to observe the correlation between the Social Capital Indexes, on the one hand, and the Indexes of Cultural and Media Consumption, on the other, in the two subsamples (Table 2). In all cases the intensity with which the indexes of social capital positively influence the indexes of cultural and media consumption is very limited both in the North and in the South. Therefore, this analysis confirms the absence of relevant

<sup>21</sup> The *Somer's D* coefficient was calculated among the "low", "medium" and "high" index values.

territorial differences regarding the relationship between social capital and informal learning choices.

Table 2. Relation between Social Capital Indexes (indep. var.) and Indexes of Cultural and Media Consumption (dep. var.): Somer's D (in italics, cases where  $p < 0.05$ )

Indexes of Cultural and Media Consumption (dep. var.)		Social capital indexes (indep.var.)			
		Significance of family network	Significance of school network	Significance of peer network	Index of Participation in Associations
Index of cultural consumption	<i>North</i>	D=.082	<i>d=.126</i>	<i>d=.071</i>	<i>d=.195</i>
	<i>South</i>	<i>d=.141</i>	<i>d=.164</i>	<i>d=0.57</i>	<i>d=.164</i>
Index of media consumption	<i>North</i>	<i>d=.209</i>	<i>d=.083</i>	<i>d=.115</i>	<i>d=.107</i>
	<i>South</i>	<i>d=.239</i>	<i>d=.075</i>	<i>d=.104</i>	<i>d=.013</i>

## Conclusions

The aim of the paper was to highlight the role of territory on formal and informal educational choices among Italian adolescents. In particular, the study has shown how the formal educational sector is an area of choice which is common and transversal to all contexts, whereas the informal sector is increasingly becoming a space of reflexivity and independence, with differences among young people in the North and in the South.

The differences emerge observing the data both from a normative and from a relational social capital perspective. In the South, trust in the adult world is understood and constructed differently than in the North and the propensity to adhere to social rules is not as strong. Moreover, the attachment to one's territory in the South paradoxically underscores a fundamental need to accept geographical mobility as instrumental to job-seeking, which is not presented in the North.

In other words, educational choice is contingently connected to the different opportunities present in a specific territorial context, which not only have an impact in terms of the development and construction of "moral norms", but also become resources for each subject's individual exploratory and decision-making abilities. Each territory, in fact, presents a

different supply of provisions (Dahrendorf, 2003) in terms of material goods, economic resources and instrumental means that are the expression of the dynamicity of the job market and of the entrepreneurial base. These contextual factors condition the choices young people make when they are confronted directly with the different opportunities present in their specific life context. If living in the South rather than in the North does not have a deterministic effect on individual choices, this still remains somewhat true in terms of the effect of family-based cultural capital, given its more consistent ascriptive force. A context with greater educational opportunities (both formal and informal) can, however, contribute to reduce the weight of ascribed variables on educational motivation and multiply the quality and quantity of chances available to each individual in the exercise of his or her own reflexive action.

In terms of choices, more specifically, young Southerners perceive the school experience as more limiting and, at the same time, compared to their Northern peers, they seem to seek a greater degree of “self-management” of their spare time and extra-curricular activities. For these adolescents extra-curricular activities involve the experience of peer socialization, typically less constrained by adult mediation, with all the risks (and the potential) that such elements may involve. Moreover, the greater need among adolescents in the South to render their spare time free of adult mediation (which, in turn, is connected to the lesser support received by one’s network of family and school relations) seems almost to reveal a desire to look for places and occasions to nurture one’s potential independently, albeit with an awareness of the scarcity of resources present in one’s local territory. Indeed, Southerners seem to express a greater need for peer socialization, a process which takes place primarily through the use of media resources.

These differences, however, do not seem sufficient to determine such decisive discontinuities that would justify a distinction between North and South in adolescents’ educational choices. Rather these differences appear to be connected, in part, to the structural supply of social capital in terms of *civiness* (Cartocci, 2006) and, in part, to the different levels of support that family, school and friendship networks are able to exercise in adolescents’ decision-making and future development.

The picture that emerges from the study, therefore, is more complex than that proposed by the North-South dichotomy, based on a quantitative axis (on the basis of the different level of territorial support). In this picture transversal and discontinuous quantitative elements coexist both at the level of the territorial contexts analysed and at the individual level. In fact, various elements of the study lead us to confer a specific relevance to reflexivity and to individuals' decision-making abilities, which, in turn, enables individuals to go beyond the structural conditioning (that continues to exist, nonetheless) exercised by family status on choices of cultural consumption in all the cities involved in the study.

The terrain of educational choices thus offers, in our opinion, an important domain within which to reflect upon the issue of the classic territorial dichotomy in Italy, especially if these differences are observed not only from the quantitative perspective of performance indicators – such as those contained in the OCSE-PISA data – but also from a qualitative perspective which focuses on understanding the motivations which underlie young people's choices.

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